

Jane Austen and Twenty-First-Century Romance



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THE MAJOR

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Abstract

"Jane Austen and Twenty-First-Century Romance" explores the connections between Austen's novels and the modern romance genre. This thesis analyzes Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and two twenty-first-century retellings—Curtis Sittenfeld's novel *Eligible* (2016) and Audrey Bellezza and Emily Harding's novel *Elizabeth of East Hampton* (2024)—which remix Austen's original text in the form of modern romance novels. My research shows that many of the tropes, plotlines, and character archetypes popular in modern romance novels were established and popularized by Austen.

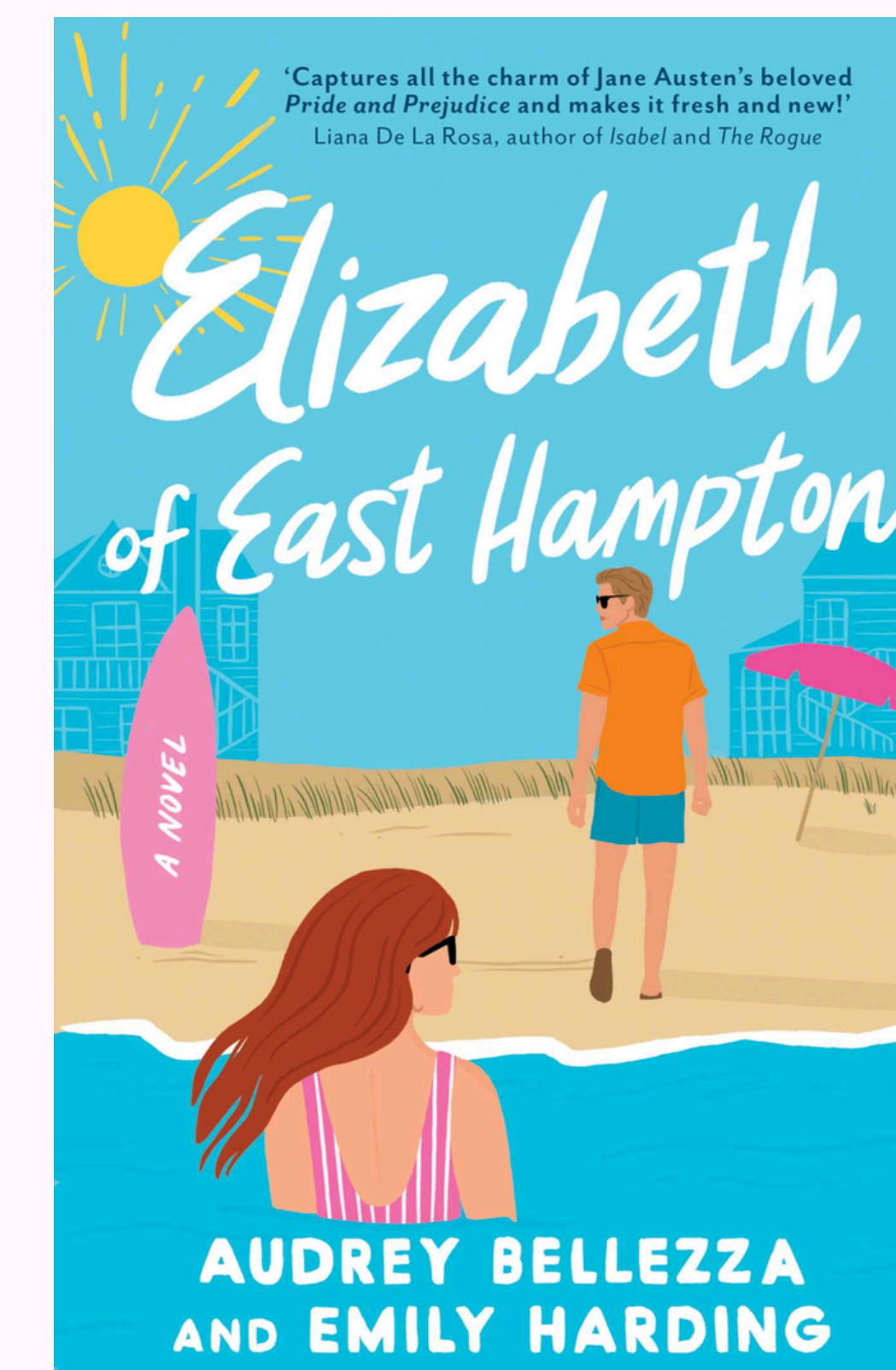
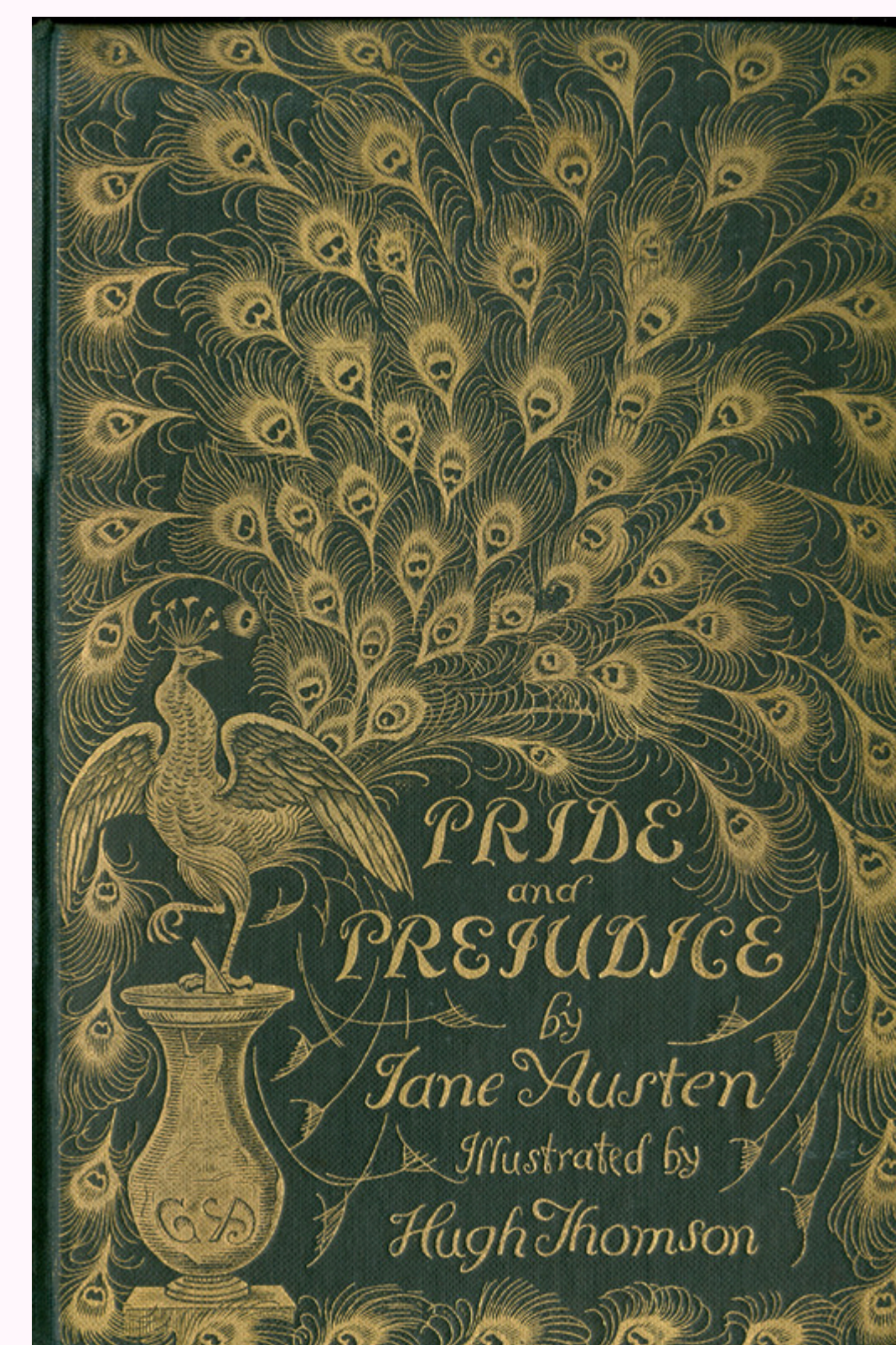
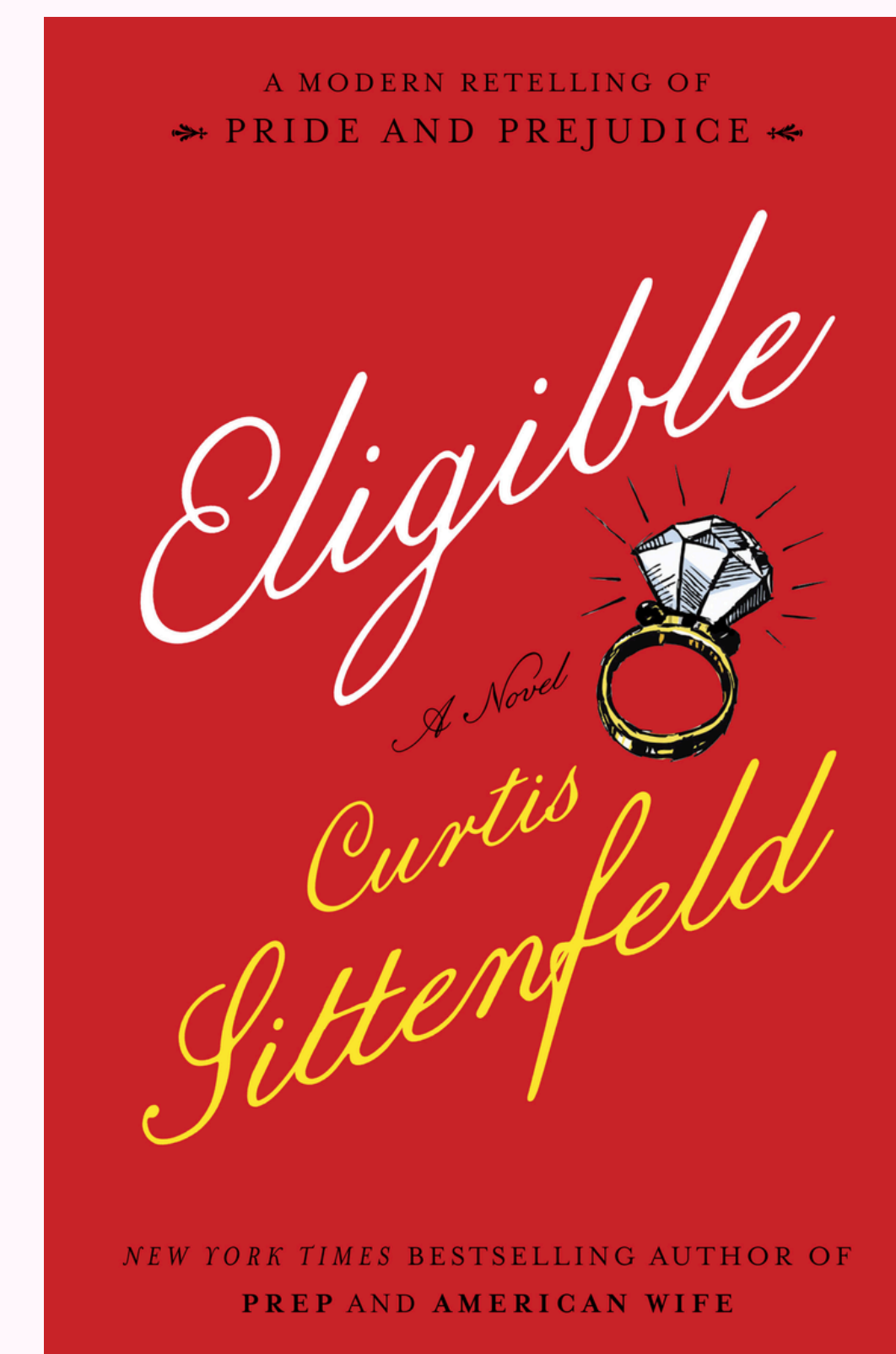
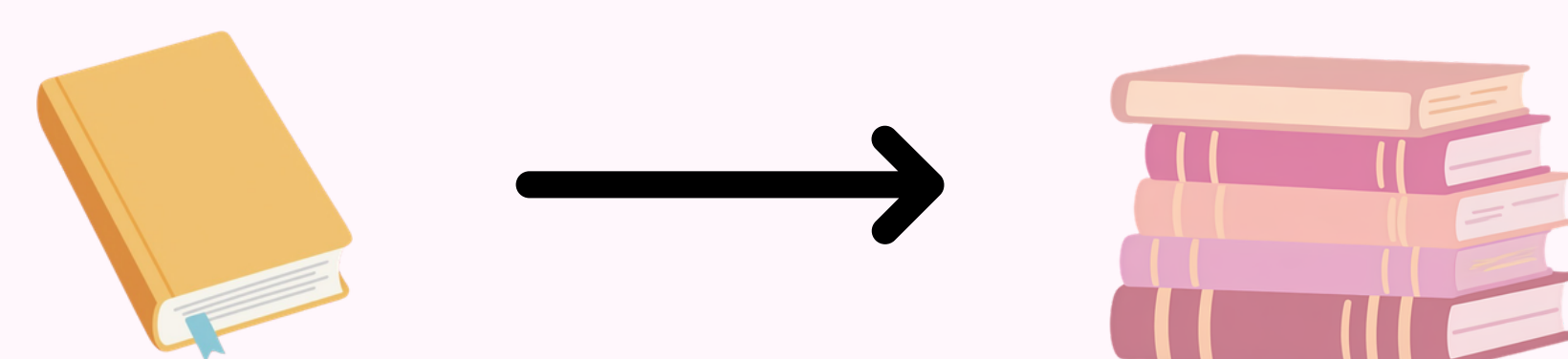
The ties between Austen's novels and twenty-first-century romance novels have remained largely unexplored. Additionally, my research is significant because much of the existing scholarship relating to adaptations of Austen's novels is about films rather than books. The romance genre is often overlooked as a scholarly subject, despite its prominence within the publishing industry and its emotional resonance to its readers—particularly women. This project bridges gaps in scholarship to showcase the lasting relevance of Austen's work and how today's romance genre is often inherently inspired by Austen's writing, continuing her feminist legacy.

Introduction

Often, Austen's novels are compared to other texts from her time, but they are less frequently compared to twenty-first-century contemporary romance novels within a scholarly setting, especially because romance is a genre that is not often taken seriously. Much of the existing scholarship is about Austen's novels and other novels from the nineteenth century. For instance, scholars Charles H. Hinnant and William H. Magee have examined Austen's novels in relation to other courtship novels, and scholar Anne K. Mellor explored Austen in relation to other women writers during the romantic period and the cultural issues that influenced their writing, such as domestic and feminist ideologies. There is even some scholarship regarding Austen's novels and their film adaptations. However, little scholarship exists about Austen's novels and romance novel adaptations, in particular. The existing threads of scholarship about Austen's novels and other novels from the nineteenth century, remixes, and the romance genre run parallel to each other, but have not been given much opportunity to intersect. Through my research and analysis, I hope to clarify and illuminate Austen's significant impact on the modern romance genre and lasting impact on today's publishing industry.

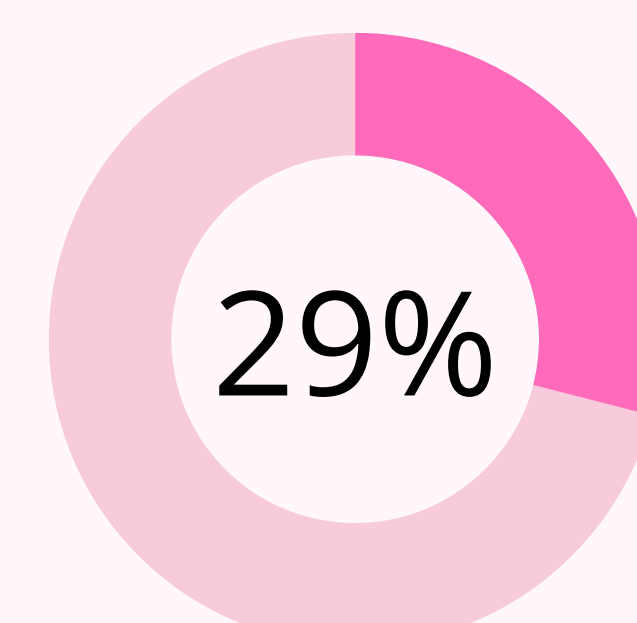
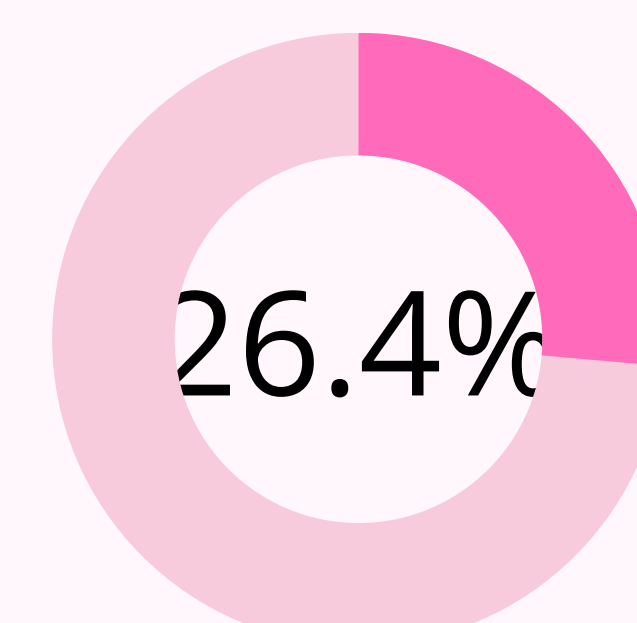
Key Term: Remix

A remix is a transformative adaptation through which something old is made new.



Romance as a Scholarly Subject

The romance genre demands to be taken seriously. It makes up the consumer book market's largest segment and subsidizes the publishing industry's other genres. Romance novels are largely written by and read by women, and they serve important purposes of emotional labor and empowerment.



METHODOLOGY

surveyed 50+ romance novels published between 2000 and 2025

read and analyzed 28 novels

created a detailed spreadsheet with tags based on attributes

analyzed general trends in Austen-inspired romance fiction

I explored books from a variety of publishers, authors, and romance subgenres to track Austen's influence on the genre and the literary marketplace. I focused my analysis on *Eligible* and *Elizabeth of East Hampton*, two novels that directly retell *Pride and Prejudice* in the twenty-first-century, because of how explicitly they show Austen's influence.

Analysis

Character Archetypes:

- Elizabeth Bennet exemplifies the headstrong heroines of twenty-first-century romance novels. She is enjoyable to read about because she plays an active role in her story and is both intelligent and independent.
- Sittenfeld, Harding, and Bellezza keep Elizabeth true to Austen's original character, but update her for the modern day, giving her added agency. For example, Sittenfeld's Elizabeth is the one who pursues Darcy at the end of *Eligible*.
- Mr. Darcy exemplifies the brooding heroes present in many twenty-first-century romance novels. He is initially prideful and misunderstood, but his layers are peeled back to reveal his true character.
- The remixed versions of Darcy emphasize the feminism in Austen's novels. Sittenfeld's Darcy is shown to be socially progressive, and readers spend time in Harding and Bellezza's Darcy's perspective, allowing them to better understand him earlier.

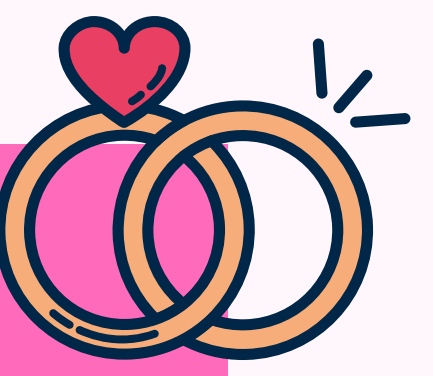
Plotlines:

- Pride and Prejudice* features the enemies-to-lovers trope popular in many of today's romance novels. This trope emphasizes the push for equality in Austen's novels, as the characters overcome their animosity.
- Remixes follow this plotline, with modernized versions Elizabeth and Darcy's initial dislike and the actions that help Elizabeth to see Darcy in a new light. This is important to overcome their initial animosity so that they can ultimately be in love at the end of the novel, thus fulfilling the enemies-to-lovers story.

Changes and Their Purposes:

- Both novels change Wickham's plotline in different ways. These changes reflect modern social issues—acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community and environmental protesting. This updating of Austen's original text reflects both what romance readers want to see and that Austen's work is still relevant, even if not all aspects of her novels are directly transferable to the twenty-first century.
- These changes take the scandal from Austen's novel and change it to make it something that some modern readers will still find scandalous. This work of making older texts newly relevant is central to what remixes do.

Conclusion



My thesis shows that Austen's novels remain relevant today, demonstrating that character archetypes, tropes, and plotlines that she popularized remain prominent in twenty-first-century romance novels. This is made especially clear in romance novels that directly remix *Pride and Prejudice*, retelling it for modern readers. Today's romance novels often feature witty heroines, misunderstood heroes, and enemies-to-lovers plotlines, much like *Pride and Prejudice*. Sittenfeld's *Eligible* and Harding and Bellezza's *Elizabeth of East Hampton* not only include these elements, but also remix Austen's novel to reflect twenty-first-century society and social dynamics, evidencing the purpose that remixing serves in updating older texts like *Pride and Prejudice* for new audiences, and emphasizing the endurance of Austen's fiction. These remixes also emphasize Austen's feminism and the push for equality between her characters.

My findings bridge the gap in scholarship surrounding the connections between Austen's novels and romance novels, and weave together the threads of Austen scholarship, romance scholarship, and remix scholarship that typically run parallel to each other without intersecting. In highlighting romance novels' connections to Austen, my thesis also emphasizes the romance genre as worthy of study and Austen's novels as feminist texts. This thesis matters because it emphasizes the way that today's romance novels are often inherently inspired by Austen's writing, the antipatriarchal nature of both, the endurance of Austen's novels, as well as the power of remix.

Next Steps

Broadening the scope of research:

- Tropes and characters in Austen's other novels
- Other *Pride and Prejudice* remixes
- Novels inspired by Austen's fiction that do not directly retell her novels
- Other character archetypes, tropes, and plotlines

References

